

Jesu Juva

“We Are Beggars, This Is True”

Text: John 8:31-36; Romans 3:19-28; Revelation 14:6-7

Grace, mercy, and peace to you from God our Father, and from our Lord and Saviour Jesus Christ. Amen.

There are a lot of famous sayings attributed to Martin Luther - some of which he actually said. But that's what happens when you're famous. People attribute things to you, even if they don't really know that you said them; even if it just sounds like something you might say. It gives whatever is being said instant credibility . . . or discredibility.

Today I want to think a bit about one thing Luther did say - or actually, that he wrote. You could call it what led to his great Reformation breakthrough. It's actually, though, not what most people think of when thinking of the Reformation: the three solas - *sola gratia*, *sola fide*, and *sola scriptura* (by grace alone, by faith alone, and by scripture alone). For those three terms, while accurately describing Luther's theology, he probably never said all together like that. The grouping of those three phrases like that would come a little later. No, the phrase I'm thinking of, that is so significant to Luther, that we could say led to his Reformation breakthrough, is this: *We are beggars, this is true*.

Luther wrote that phrase on a little slip of paper that was found in his pocket when he died. Now, like the many sayings that are attributed to Luther, there is some disagreement over what exactly was written on that slip of paper; different versions of the story. But what all the versions agree on is this last line. *We are beggars, this is true*. And I would say this to you today: when you know that, then you know Luther, you know the three solas, and you know what the Reformation was about. Including what came to be known as kind of a fourth sola: *sola christus*.

We are beggars, this is true. When you know that, you know there is absolutely nothing you can do for God. You cannot climb up to God through meditation or contemplation or mysticism. You cannot be righteous through your own efforts at good works and prayer and self-denial. You cannot earn God's favor or merit by going above and beyond the call of Christian duty. You cannot offer to God anything you have to atone for your sins. All of these things were being taught at the time in some way, shape, or form. But if you're a beggar, you cannot. If you're a beggar, you got nothing.

If you're a beggar, you're like the people in the subway station standing there with a cup, calling out for help. Or, to put that in the words of the Bible, calling out: *Lord, Son of David, have mercy on me*.

Now, in the subway stations, many just pass by those beggars. Some pretend not to see

them. Some don't care. Some are skeptical of them. Some are too busy to help. Some are late and in too much of a rush. But for us who are beggars before God, there is one who stops. The Son of David. The Good Samaritan. The Good Shepherd. The Son of God Himself, the promised Messiah. And He doesn't just throw a coin or two into our cups; He pours into our hearts His forgiveness, life, and salvation. He takes us out of the subway station and puts us in His mansion. He feeds us, dresses us, cleans us, and binds us up. He does everything for us beggars, all that we need.

Once He does, that doesn't mean we're no longer beggars - we still are before God. For everything we have is His, though given to us. So how silly if we were to then go out and start bragging! I did this. I built this. I earned this. I achieved this. No, *we are beggars, it is true*. Always receiving. Always receiving from our God and Saviour what we need.

And that's why our salvation is by grace alone - **sola gratia**. Our Lord helps beggars. There is an old saying in the world: *God helps those who help themselves*. I cannot think of a much more unbiblical and untrue saying. God helps us not because we deserve it, not because of who WE are, but because of who HE is. God helps those who cannot help themselves. As beggars, all that we have from God is pure gift. Completely undeserved grace. *Sola gratia*.

That's also then why our salvation is by faith alone - **sola fide**. All we can do is *receive* this gift of God, this undeserved gift, by faith. For if you're that beggar in the subway, you could brag about your cup - how big it is, how strong it is, how marvelous and magnificent it is. And if someone asked you: *how did you get that help?* You could say: *I have a great cup!* But it's not really. It's because you have a great Lord, a great and merciful Saviour. Your cup is your faith, and He fills it. It's all Him. It's all by grace, through faith. *Sola fide*.

And that's then why it is by Scripture alone - **sola scriptura**. Our cup, our faith, is given and formed by the Word of God. The Word of God which tells us of our Saviour, where we learn of His great mercy for us. The Word of God by which we learn of the forgiveness Jesus won for us on the cross, by His perfect life, death, and resurrection in our place. And the Word of God joined with water, words, and bread and wine, attaching God's promises and gifts to these things, making them means, or vehicles, of grace. Turning plain water into Holy Baptism. Turning plain words in to Holy Absolution. Turning plain bread and wine into the Body and Blood of Jesus in His Holy Communion. Without the Word, we wouldn't have these and we wouldn't know of them. So this too is all Him, all gift. *Sola scriptura*.

And putting all this together, you have **sola christus** - by Christ alone. Which really isn't so much a *fourth* sola as it is the overarching one. For it is Christ alone that creates and fills the other three. *We are beggars, this is true*. He is the friend, the helper, the Saviour, of beggars. *This is true*. Everything we are, everything we have, is Christ alone. From

creation to redemption to everlasting life - it is all Christ. *Sola christus*.

We are beggars, this is true. No matter who you are, no matter how accomplished, no matter how wealthy. All people, the reading from Revelation reminds us, ***every nation and tribe and language and people*** need the eternal Gospel. That we might receive what we do not have. That we might receive what we need for eternal life.

We are beggars, this is true. This is what Paul was explaining in Romans. For the Law of God shows us how beggarly and miserable we are. The Law say be this, but we are not. The Law says do this, but we do not. The Law says don't do this, and that we do! And so boast, Paul asks? What do we have to boast of? No, the Law of God shuts us up. The Law holds us accountable. The Law shows us the debt we cannot pay. *We are beggars, this is true*. And still running up the debt.

But, Paul goes on, *while we are all beggars, this is true, we are forgiven, this is true!* Through the redemption that is in Christ Jesus. Through Jesus who paid our debt. Through Jesus who died our death. Through Jesus who risen from the dead, gives us His righteousness. Who fills our beggarly cups with the riches of His grace.

And did you catch the three solas in those words from Paul? ***The Law and the Prophets***, he says, ***bear witness to the righteousness of God*** - *sola scriptura*. ***Justified by His grace as a gift*** - *sola gratia*. ***To be received by faith*** - *sola fide*. All by Christ Jesus, who is all in all - *sola christus*. That we beggars may boast after all. Not in ourselves, but in Christ. *We are beggars, this is true*. But now we are saints, this is true! (But more on that next week!)

And then finally we heard from John. Actually, he didn't say *we are beggars* - he uses even stronger words: *we are slaves*. Slaves to sin. Slaves in bondage. Slaves who cannot do what we want to do. Because of the sin in us. The sin born in us. The sin that keeps erupting out of us in hurtful words, selfish deeds, shameful thoughts, and impure desires. And it is a slavery that is dangerous and deceitful because it masks itself as freedom. For you think you can do whatever you want, but what you want is what your slavery tells you to want, what your sin tells you to want, what your sinful flesh craves and the sin you feed it. Giving up Paradise for a tasty bite or two, that quickly turns bitter. Yes *we are beggars, this is true*.

But then we get John's version of *sola christus*. *We are beggars, this is true*, but ***if the Son sets you free, you are free indeed***. The Son, hope for beggars. The Son, friend of beggars. The Son, freedom for beggars. The Son, Saviour of beggars. Or as Luther wrote in his hymn:

*With might of ours can naught be done,
Soon were our loss effected;*

*But for us fights the valiant One,
Whom God Himself elected.
Ask ye, Who is this? Jesus Christ it is! (LSB #656 v. 2)*

Sola christus, for beggars. There is freedom in no one else. But there is freedom in Him. There is no other way for us beggars to have hope. But there is hope in Him.

We are beggars, this is true. So if you remember only one saying of Luther's on this Reformation Day, remember that one. And stick out your cup of faith in repentance for Jesus to fill. To fill you with His forgiveness, His mercy, His love. To fill you with His Spirit. To fill your mouths now with His Body and Blood. For the truth is: where Jesus is, it's good to be a beggar.

In the Name of the Father and of the (+) Son and of the Holy Spirit. Amen.